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Mahathir-Saddam

MAHATHIR SAYS REMOVING SADDAM WILL NOT SOLVE TERRORISM ISSUE

PUTRAJAYA, Oct 7 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that removing President Saddam Hussein from power and bringing democracy to Iraq would not solve problems affecting that country nor tackle international terrorism effectively.

The prime minister said US President George W. Bush was also taking the wrong stance in fighting terrorism because the Americans were angered by the Sept 11 attacks and angry people usually did not think rationally.

The key to tackling the problem was finding the root causes of terrorism, he said at a one-hour dialogue at his office, here, with 40 international and local media fellows comprising senior journalists who had come for the East Asia Economic Summit organised by the World Economic Forum in Kuala Lumpur.

The prime minister fielded a wide range of questions ranging from tackling international terrorism to the greater emphasis on the English language in Malaysian schools.

Dr Mahathir again maintained that the root causes of terrorism must be found in order to eradicate it.

He revealed that Malaysia also faced a terrorist insurgency when it attained independence some 45 years ago but managed to find its root causes.

He said it was found that many Chinese residents in the country felt that they did not have a stake in the country when they were not made citizens then.

As such, about one million Chinese in the country were given citizenship papers and the insurgents eventually gave up their fight, he added.

Dr Mahathir said Bush should listen to the views of the international community in tackling the terrorism issue.

Save for Britain, he said, the other countries were not supportive of air strikes against Iraq.

To a question on whether a change of regime or bringing democracy to Iraq could solve problems in that country, Dr Mahathir said democracy also did not solve problems in many Latin American countries.

As for the rude treatment of foreign travellers at U.S. airports, he said this had increased the fear of flying and was also not contributing to the recovery of the global economy.

Asked to elaborate on his call to Muslim countries to use oil as a weapon, Dr Mahathir said his suggestion was based on the premise that since they produced most of the world's oil, they still had some strength through the commodity.

However, he felt that Muslim countries were still divided and weak and this caused them to be oppressed by other countries.

On relations with Singapore, he said: "We are still on talking terms."

However, Dr Mahathir said, there were several issues that needed to be resolved between the two countries. They included the purchase of raw water from Malaysia at three sen per 1,000 gallons, contributions to Singapore's Central Provident Fund, which workers from peninsular Malaysia who had worked in the republic had been unable to withdraw, and land reclamation by the island republic.

Dr Mahathir said the payment of three sen per 1,000 gallons was contained in an agreement drawn up by the British in 1927 when Singapore

was a British colony and Johor, a British protectorate.

Malaysia pays Singapore 50 sen per 1,000 gallons to buy back treated water from Singapore.

"How many things are still being charged at 1927 prices today?" the prime minister said.

-- BERNAMA

SHY HK JK